

# Case Study: Frugal Forest

**COUNCIL NAME**

MIDWASTE

**WEB ADDRESS**

<http://frugalforest.oneofmakery.net.au/>

**SIZE**

21,375 square kilometres

**POPULATION**

304,366

(8 Councils combined)

## Overview

Frugal Forest, a community arts project spanning three years across the Mid North Coast of NSW, embraced community participation through a series of creative workshops with a diverse range of participants. The aim was to create an intricately detailed forest installation entirely from stuff headed for landfill, because a forest is a living example of a sustainable zero-waste system, waste is an opportunity and there's no such thing as a dump. The project culminated in a touring exhibition, facilitating significant community engagement through community workshops, artist talks, online content and an education kit for schools.

## Background

MIDWASTE Regional Waste Forum is a voluntary organisation of eight councils located on the Mid North Coast focused on improved waste management and resource recovery.

Local artist Bryony Anderson inspired the collaborative project between local artists and MIDWASTE. Frugal Forest provided an opportunity to explore an arts-based approach to community waste education.



The project aimed to provoke a shift in perception and behaviour about resource consumption and waste. The Frugal Forest exemplifies the notion of the circular economy in an engaging way and invites participants to reflect on their own resource consumption behaviour motivating positive change.

The project objectives were determined between local artists and MIDWASTE, leading to support for the project, a grant to develop the concept from the Australia Council and MIDWASTE contribution of \$70,000.

Objectives included:

1. Address the MIDWASTE Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy 2014-2021 objectives.
2. Explore and critically evaluate the potential of creative educational approaches as a community engagement mechanism for motivating improved waste behaviours in relation to resource consumption and waste generation.
3. Facilitate significant community participation, reach and engagement across a large geographic area through workshops in all 8 council areas to a wide audience including schools, school holiday programs, market activities, artist masterclasses, youth intensives and drop-in craft sessions.
4. Expand the project reach to engage many more people through a 2016 regional exhibition tour to local galleries including artist talks, hands-on workshops and guided tours.

5. Create an online presence through the development of an education kit for local schools (<http://frugalforest.oneoffmastery.net.au/education/>), the production of short films alongside a website and Facebook page to further strengthen community reach and engagement.

## Implementation

The Frugal Forest project comprised a three year community arts program culminating in a regional exhibition tour. MIDWASTE worked collaboratively with the Frugal Forest team to plan the project scope and objectives. Project steps comprised a collection and creative community workshops phase (2013 - 2015) followed by a regional touring phase (2016 - 2017).

Waste materials were collected through direct approach to local businesses, markets and public libraries. Over 10,700 items were collected and transformed into forest elements using craft techniques taught during community creative workshops. Involving local community in the collection phase stimulated initial interest in the project.

Some 55 Frugal Forest workshops were delivered in eight Council areas with attendees from 3 to 88 years of age, an online schools education kit developed, and the tour (including further community workshops) to four regional galleries. School workshops, market activities, artist masterclasses, youth intensives and drop-in craft sessions were a means to introduce respect for precious resources that are usually treated as 'disposable' while creating works that formed part of the final installation.

Community soundscape workshops were held with renowned composer Rae Howell, in consultation with a forest ecologist and a local composer, recording sounds found in everyday junk enabling the creation of a soundscape simulating a day in a temperate rainforest.

The Frugal Forest exhibition launched at the Glasshouse with an attendance of over 4,400 people in 14 days, and was named 'Top Pick for the Summer Holidays' by Arts Mid North Coast. Gloucester Gallery also experienced record crowds and the Forest is now being showcased to communities throughout the MIDWASTE region and beyond, alongside further workshops, talks, tours and the distribution of the online education kit.

Project partners included local artists, scientists, musicians, ecologists, MIDWASTE, Councils, Art Galleries, Hastings Respite Care, North Coast TAFE and hundreds of community volunteers.

## Outcomes

The Frugal Forest project achieved the following:

- The creation of a detailed forest entirely from reclaimed materials with over 1,500 people participating including schools, community groups, aged care centres and markets and more than 6,000 hours of handwork.
- 55 creative workshops in 8 council areas. With 844 people participating in 36 exhibition based community workshops.
- An exhibition tour in 3 locations with 6,500 attendees (goal of 10,000 by the end of 2017).
- An online presence through an education kit, short films, website and Facebook page.

- Extensive media coverage on radio, television, social media and newspapers, documentary screening on national ABCTV and an exhibition at the Waste 2015 Conference.
- The evaluation of the value of innovative, creative waste education approaches as a priority for motivating improved waste behaviour through the collation of qualitative and quantitative data throughout the project and tour.
- Teachers, schools and TAFE Early Childhood educators utilising the online education kit
- 83% of exhibition attendees reporting motivation to undertake personal action in relation to waste and resource consumption behaviour
- Securing a permanent home for the Forest enabling ongoing community engagement with waste education and increased local tourism.
- The formation of a local association, Frugal Arts Inc., dedicated to delivering community arts based education projects related to waste management and resource recovery.

### Key Learnings

The Frugal Forest achieved unprecedented community reach and engagement both within the MIDWASTE region and beyond. An exhibition attendee survey completed by 460 people to date indicates the majority of attendees visited for art/craft interest or for cultural, community or personal connection reasons, with 30% suggesting the project was successful in engaging people who may not otherwise connect with waste education. Attendee comments were overwhelmingly positive, saying the exhibition influenced their thoughts about waste and resource consumption.

The project indicates that high quality community arts approaches to waste education offer significant value, engage a broader audience than more traditional waste education activities and could be utilised for other sustainability education initiatives.

The future focus is ensuring that the project's impact continues through online content and exhibitions and securing a permanent home in a regional centre for the Forest (currently under negotiation) to ensure the waste education potential continues to be realised.

### Contact

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**This project was the 2016 winner of the Communication, Education and Empowerment Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards**